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Ray S. Cline

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INTERVIEW II

DATE: May 31, 1983

INTERVIEWEE: RAY S. CLINE

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: Dr. Cline's office, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

C: Well, I'm sure you recollect the timing and the formal definitions of the Mongoose operation better than I do, but as I recall it, it was a persistent theme in national security circles' thinking about Cuba that we ought to be able to overthrow Castro, or get rid of Castro as people tended loosely to say, in other ways than by invading his island, as we sort of did in the Bay of Pigs, or trying to murder him, as later on we all discovered that a few people had had in mind for some time.

Just for the historical record, in case it makes any difference, the existence of the formal plan to assassinate Castro is the only operational program of any consequence that I know of that I might have been exposed to and was not. Dick Helms never mentioned it to me. I learned later that he didn't mention it to John McCone for a long time, too, so I guess I shouldn't have my feelings hurt, and I'm sure he was trying to keep it covered up for many good reasons.

But at any rate, after the Bay of Pigs and even after the Cuban missile crisis, I know that the Kennedys and John McCone, who talked to me about it almost as soon as I came back to Washington in the spring of 1962 to become deputy director for intelligence, were

preoccupied with the Cuban threat, the affront of having a Soviet-oriented communist regime in the Western Hemisphere. In those days people still spoke about the Monroe Doctrine as being a concept which ought to underlie our policy and ought to justify rather strenuous measures, if we felt they were necessary, to prevent the importation to this hemisphere of what they used to call an alien form of government. Of course, the original alien form of government was monarchy and this is the communist dictatorship. But as I say, that idea that the United States had a kind of responsibility to prevent the form of government which was viewed as alien to our institutions, very correctly, I think, from taking hold in Cuba was occasionally discussed. At least the idea struck responsive chords whenever it was touched on. Now, Mongoose, as I understand it, was the operational plan, which seemed to me to be very amorphous, to bring this about after the Bay of Pigs failed. As far as I recall, it stayed on as a program up till the time of Kennedy's death. I'm not even sure whether it ever got wiped out, but it certainly got called off eventually.

G: Were your analysts ever asked to evaluate the plan. . . ?

C: No. As far as I can remember, I was authorized to discuss this with some of my analysts in terms of the problem, the issues, and my opinion on Mongoose was very specifically asked by McCone. But no formal papers were ever written that I remember, nor I suppose would they want any of the desk level analysts to know that it was an approved project. However, John McCone was always more relaxed about some of these things than other people in the clandestine services

might have been, and he talked to me regularly about it, not telling me everything he was thinking and doing, I am sure, but asking my opinion on many subjects and saying, in accordance with the understanding which we had in general, that I would be a kind of cut-out between the clandestine services, for whom I had worked some, and the Directorate of Intelligence, which I then headed. So I could formulate the questions knowing full well the operational problem in a way which would elicit the information needed from the analysts without necessarily and preferably without giving the analysts the detailed picture of where the policy makers were going, that was the concept. I used to say I was supposed to be a permeable membrane between the analytical and the operational sides of CIA.

G: You let some things through and others you prevented?

C: And I took that very conscientiously and would indeed call in key analysts and say, "Just thinking out loud, if you were asked the following questions, what would you say?" And they were pretty savvy and may have guessed pretty well what I had in mind, but we observed the proprieties and did not surface the operations. I'm sure Mongoose wasn't known to very many people. In fact I don't recall until long afterward seeing any very formal paper on it myself, but I wrote down suggestions for McCone. Chet Cooper, who was my assistant or deputy part of that time and was working into the White House in a staff circle to which he I think eventually went full time, was involved in some of that planning and he wrote memos for McCone, as I recall it. We certainly discussed what, as far as I could figure out, had to be

essentially a program of economic warfare. Now, there was an operational side to it in that some of the teams that had been prepared for infiltration of Cuba for various purposes, to collect intelligence or organize a resistance group or anti-Castro resistance group or whatever, were infiltrated to do what I would call superficial economic sabotage. They tried to cause trouble for the economy of Cuba. That was the angle, at any rate, of Mongoose that I worked on and commented on and may have written some papers, though I don't remember them anymore as to exactly what they were.

But McCone's thought, and he was very deadly serious about all this, was that it was crucial to have Cuban communism a failure. That if we couldn't destroy it, as he would have liked to at the time of the Cuban missile crisis, directly by military means, we ought to make it as unattractive as possible by making it a poor show economically for the Cuban people. He was not around as CIA Director at the time of the Bay of Pigs, but he certainly espoused the "surgical air attack" in 1962. And I think that economic discrediting was the main thrust of the operational planning in this sort of thing after mid-1961. The ideas discussed were so vague, and different people knew different things about what was in hand, that I was never absolutely sure whether something more ambitious was in train, and evidently now I know that for a number of years they were hoping some Cuban agent would shoot Castro and make Castroism definitively a failure. But that was not discussed with me.

We had this concept of two concentric purposes within the Mongoose context. One was to make sure that Castro was not able to export the revolution and communism to other countries, and we were very much on to watching for arms shipments and all that. There were a bunch of crises over it and a bunch of occasions when assistance was given to other Latin American countries in internal security. And all that leading eventually to Che Guevara's death was a side of our operational program in Central America and the Caribbean. But Mongoose, as I understood it, was aimed at Cuba proper and it was to prevent the economy from being successful. I know that the agency sent out lots of operational instructions, and they were still going out years later when I was station chief in Germany, which wasn't till 1966. We continued to get messages occasionally saying go do something to interfere with or damage a shipment of economic supplies of some kind to Cuba in Western Europe, and the justification was, without being very explicit, this implied economic warfare against the government of Cuba. I know, and it certainly has been revealed since, that there were lots of little gimmicks like spoiling the bearings in certain kinds of machinery, putting flat bearings in instead of ball bearings, trying to adulterate petrol supplies with sugar and various contaminants. All of that was part of it, as well as direct attack on certain facilities in Cuba. I don't remember any one target specifically now, but I think it was some kind of mining installations. I think they actually assaulted and tried to blow them up or something.

That's what I understood Mongoose to be, though, to be a mainly economic harrassment war against Castro to destroy him without a direct military assault. Is that right? Is that your impression?

G: Yes, that's right. Do you recall the comments that you were asked to give and what you had to say?

C: Well, not very clearly. I believe that this concept of the tightening economic noose was one that Chet Cooper and I put together in 1962, because I think McCone asked me to pay some attention to it fairly soon after I came back, saying in effect, you know, that they screwed up at the Bay of Pigs and nobody's got any very good idea of what we ought to be doing, but we've got to do something. This is still a serious situation. We cannot tolerate the spread of Castro-type communism in Latin American. And after the Bay of Pigs it seemed obvious that no direct military assault was going to take place, and I felt that the Cuban motivation was not very ideological nor very strong and that Castro would be viewed as a success if he improved the standard of living of the Cubans and be viewed as a failure if he didn't.

So I certainly urged this economic strangulation concept, recognizing, though, that it was not likely to bring the economy to a standstill, was not likely to prevent him from being in rigid control of the country, but that it could make the system unpopular, could make it more difficult for him to take steps both inside and outside the country that we would oppose, and generally move him into measures for his own internal security that would be unpopular with the Cubans

and make it harder for him to operate. So we were in a sense doing what the Russians do so well and using much smaller assets that we had in Cuba, as they do in other countries, to force the regime on the defensive and to use its economic resources unwisely and to experience some sabotage of them.

So I can't say a great deal for this concept except that it was in the ballpark and it was assigned somewhere between outright war and surrender, and that was Operation Mongoose, a sort of classical covert action program supported by the government, as far as I can know, fairly enthusiastically for a time and probably unrealistically enthusiastically on the part of some of the politicians. We never saw it, as I said, the people I talked to in the DDI [Directorate of Intelligence], nor did I ever hear the operators in DDO [Directorate of Operations] was very optimistic about its being totally successful. But the feeling was, well, we're supposed to make life tough for Castro. Bobby Kennedy certainly wanted it, [so did] Jack Kennedy, while he was alive, and there isn't much else you can do except take targets of opportunity. The only thing I remember that really still impresses me was the fact that John McCone, who was a businessman, felt that this could have a distinctly deleterious effect on the Cuban economy, and he was relentless in pursuing it. He was the one who would say, "Have you reminded the station chiefs everywhere in the world that if they know that some transaction involving trade to Cuba is taking place, try to do something about it. Try to make it unsuccessful." So he was committed to it perhaps more than almost anyone



else and maybe under other circumstances it might have been more successful. But I think it suffered from two things: first, in 1962 the success of the Cuban missile crisis kind of eased the feeling that we had to do something about Castro though it didn't change the basic analysis, and then of course Jack Kennedy's death in 1963 changed all the bidding in terms of government policy-making generally.

G: Would it be misleading to say that the vendetta sort of ended with Kennedy's death?

C: Well, yes, I guess you could say that. I think the very bitter personal feeling that both Jack and Bobby had--I called it an obsession once in writing and Arthur Schlesinger jumped down my throat, and Mac [McGeorge] Bundy, for saying that the President was obsessed. But whatever, he was certainly very determined to try to get even with Castro for what he thought of as a humiliation at the Bay of Pigs. I think that did end and it was unique. On the other hand, I think Lyndon Johnson was just as concerned about the problem. I feel that Johnson tried to pick up exactly where Kennedy left off on all these matters. He certainly was not enthusiastic about the prospects of getting involved in the Vietnam War but he never questioned that the nation had to do it, and I think he felt the same way about Castro. Whatever it was we were doing that was anti-Castro, he would continue to support, and it probably took him a while to find out what we were doing. So I don't think there was a big change in policy, but after Jack's death the spirit was just a little different.

G: Less intensity.

C: Yes.

G: Did you have any contact with Ed Lansdale on Mongoose?

C: A little bit but not a great deal. He was the central planner in this kind of operation, but I had a somewhat unusual position, I think, in that I had met Lansdale and met nearly everybody in the clandestine business when I was station chief in Taiwan before I was deputy director. So nearly all the operators trusted me and told me things that technically and in the old days the DDI was never cut in on. So I would sort of float in and out of these things. It often was not my business to write papers or comment on operational programs but every once in a while McCone would say, "Come on along with me to this meeting. I'm going to the White House," you know.

So I would get into some of the clandestine planning more than I really wanted to. And McCone I think was--well, he used to say, "As far as I'm concerned, you're my China specialist no matter what happens." Anything China he would ask me about, and to some extent, for not very good reasons, I think, he felt that everybody had screwed up on Cuba, so he kind of tried me out on Cuba once in a while, too. But that was pretty much at the pleasure of the Director and I never pushed it any farther than he insisted, because I wasn't altogether comfortable sometimes with making proposals and suggestions in the clandestine field when I simply didn't have time or opportunity to do my homework. I know that in the clandestine operational field if you don't know all the details, you're likely to make a mistake, and that's the whole point of those operations is to be meticulous in

handling every possible source of difficulty before it comes up. And since I couldn't do that I tended to stay with the general analysis, which I thought was useful from the DDI but not determinative in the operational sense.

G: One hears in the literature allegations that the operational side of the CIA did not benefit from the comments of the analysts as much as they perhaps should have.

C: Yes.

G: What's your comment on that?

C: Well, I don't know. Maybe I have said something like this before, but let me just briefly say that I feel that the operational mind and the operational personality is different from the analytical mind or personality. It does not mean they're totally different, but it's like a spectrum in which one side tends towards one end of the spectrum and one towards the other. A good analyst obviously overlaps with the preoccupations of a good operator and vice versa. Ideally they would be the same. They would cover the whole spectrum; they'd think all the abstract thoughts and all the possible generalizations and yet get down to all the nitty-gritty of what you can do and how you do it and what sort of personalities you can manipulate and so on.

But basically I would say, in oversimplifying, your analyst is trying to abstract general frameworks of ideas out of any issue he's studying so as to predict what's going to happen next and see patterns of past and future situations, whereas the operator has some such framework in his mind, and the more conscious he is of what it is,

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talking to them to know what conclusion they were looking to draw. My impression was that they had called me in just routinely, and that because this incident had just taken place they asked me to give them a full briefing on it, and I probably had more of the files and more of the data at hand than anybody else who had briefed them. So I gave them a pretty thorough rundown, but no very clear conclusion probably emerged from it that I know. It was only later that I got, as I say, [to] feeling uneasy about this rush to take action, and frankly I didn't have a lot of confidence that any of them, either McNamara or Johnson, would not act with insufficient intelligence if he felt that what he was doing was right and he wanted to do it. They wanted to have intelligence support, but they were not very demanding. They would be perfectly happy to go off with something that met their criteria and wouldn't necessarily meet mine. I think that's pretty likely.

I don't know, I've argued with such people over the years about it, and some of them I had great respect for. I remember arguing with Chip [Charles] Bohlen once about U-2s when I went to the White House in early 1961 or 1962--I don't know, being a historian I get hesitant every time I start to mention a date because I know how often you remember them wrong. At any rate, I went to the White House, with Allen Dulles' approval in the early 1960s when I was in Taiwan still, to get a U-2 program set up against China after they were called off in Russia. I said, "You know, there's going to be a narrow window here when we can take a lot of pictures in China before they can shoot

the plane down, and we need it, we don't know anything about China, practically. Let's do it." It was very useful, I think. But I had to carry that ball personally up to the President; nobody else wanted to do it. The arguments leading up to it led me to have a scrap with Chip Bohlen who was arguing that the U-2 had caused all this trouble in Russia, hence God knows it would cause trouble elsewhere. And I remember sitting in the corner of the White House while we were debating those things, him saying to me, "You know, there's just an awful lot of intelligence that you guys can get, such as photography, that I'm happy to have if it's free, but I'd rather do without it than have any additional international trouble over it. Because fundamentally, you know, we old diplomats, old foreign service officers, have to depend on our intuition and judgment about situations, and the evidence the intelligence people give us seldom makes much difference."

G: He was saying this when?

C: It was 1961 or 1962.

G: Well, it must have been before the Cuban missile crisis.

C: Yes, it was. No, I always felt the Cuban missile crisis vindicated the old bird, but it was in the doghouse from May 1960 when what's his name [Gary Francis Powers] was shot down until [then]. And it didn't fly for a while and then they put it back on in Cuba and China. Right away I started urging it to be used in China, and there was a lot of resistance, probably from State. As I say, I remember being told up and down the line, "Look, we're for you, but we aren't going to carry the ball. If you want to carry this ball, come back and do it your-

self." (Laughter) So I went on right up and ended up talking to Jack Kennedy himself about it, who said, "Yes, that's a good idea. Go ahead and do it." You know, that's the way these things happen. But that was the time at which I had that fight with Chip. It was a fight, but I just said, "Jesus, that's a narrow-minded goddamn attitude." He said, "Well, you know, my experience is that fundamentally what we know from our background and our judgment of the people we are talking to is what really determines the policy we will take, and all the detail you add to it, we like it. I'm not running down your profession, but don't cause us any trouble to get it because I would rather do without it than to have [trouble]."

G: You were making unnecessary waves for the diplomats?

C: That's right, that's right. Well, you see, he had been there with Eisenhower at the May [1960] showdown with Khrushchev, and it must have been pretty unpleasant.

G: Yes, apparently it was. Ike was furious.

C: Yes. Well, Khrushchev was impossible. He was posturing all the time, you know, but that's what happened.

Okay, well, you got any more? I'm running out of steam. I think probably those are the most useful comments I have.

G: Well, I have more, but I never press past a--

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II